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# Entrepreneur

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## How to Make Your Business Dream a Reality

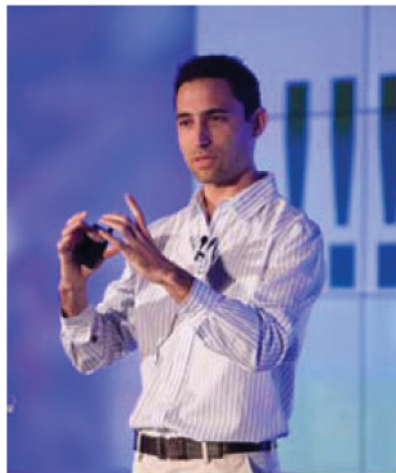
Coming up with ideas is easy. Executing on them is the hard part. These tips from Scott Belsky can help get you started.

Tim Beyers | October 18, 2010

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Scott Belsky knows why you don't get things done. You have too many ideas. Belsky, 30, author of [Making Ideas Happen](#) (Portfolio, 2010), argues that most entrepreneurs suffer from idea-to-idea syndrome, jumping from one big idea to the next while executing none.

Startup failure rates suggest he's right, and he's built a business to address the problem. Belsky is the founder of [Behance LLC](#), a firm in New York City which



Scott Belsky

operates a networking website for creative professionals called The Behance Network, a tip site for productivity junkies called The99Percent.com, and sells web-based productivity software based on the Action Method.

The Action Method breaks work into a series of steps represented by verbs that specify the next things to be done in executing an idea. Write the plan. Ship the product. Invoice the customer. Here are Belsky's three tips for using the Action Method to create a company that executes.

### **Hire the killjoys.**

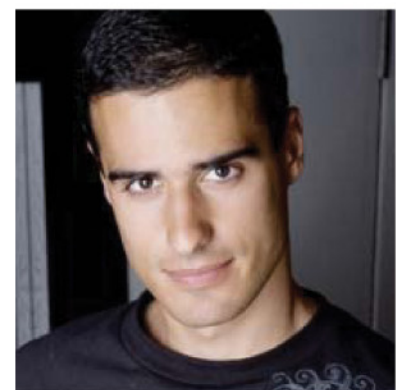
The first step to activating the Action Method, Belsky says, is to create an "immune system" that kills ideas. This means hiring killjoys to capture every action step and say no to new ideas -- rightfully so, in most cases.

"It's important for entrepreneurs to hire people they don't necessarily want to have a beer with but who can be the immune system in their startup," Belsky says.

Founders sometimes play this role, too. Francis Pedraza, a long-time Reserve Officer Training Corps student from a military family, enforces focus at his Ithaca, N.Y.-based startup of 17 fellow Cornell University students, [The DoBand Campaign](#).

DoBand is a social network where participants hold each other accountable to get things done. Each participant has a wearable band that identifies them and their proposed tasks.

Pedraza, who manages the company using Belsky's Action Method productivity software, says the team's performance slipped during the summer months while working remotely. Upon their return in the fall, he brought in new team members, challenged others and cut those who weren't performing.



Francis Pedraza



"If you've got enough guts to fire one or two people on the team, miracles start to happen," Pedraza says. In this case, he and his team raised \$75,000 in funding just a few months into the life of the business.

#### **Work with a bias toward action.**

No doubt accountability is a key feature of the action-oriented startup, but perhaps the most important attribute is a propensity to act. For that to occur, Belsky says entrepreneurs need to unlearn some things.

"It's important, in the early stages of a creative project, to almost do the opposite of what we're taught growing up, which is to think before we act," Belsky says. "Startups have to recognize that their competitive advantage against the big guys is that they have the space to [experiment]."

What they don't have is time. Today's startups build and release products in days rather than months. In that environment, action is a survival skill, Belsky says, especially if the original concept was right all along.

Evan Saks, founder of build-to-order mattress maker [Create-A-Mattress.com](http://Create-A-Mattress.com) in Needham, Mass., learned this lesson the hard way. He says his team spent two months talking with suppliers about adding options before his design agency pushed him to focus on getting the company's website live. Feedback would dictate changes, the agency's owner said. It was just the wake-up call Saks needed.

"Following that meeting, I created a roadmap that let the other vendors see there was a place for them in the future. Then, I set the roadmap aside and put all energies into launching the core website the way it was originally conceived," Saks says.

#### **Change your vocabulary.**

While taking action can be the key to getting unstuck, talking action is often necessary to produce growth. "You need an environment where people are obsessed with taking action steps," Belsky says.



Evan Saks

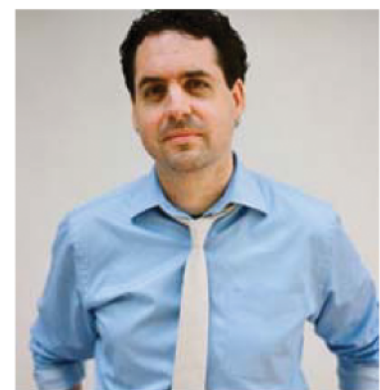
This behavior manifests in various ways. Belsky says he's seen action-obsessed managers run meetings in which no one's allowed to sit. The thinking: Weak-kneed participants are more likely to keep discussion short and focused. Others force meeting participants to speak aloud the action steps assigned to them. The theory? If you speak what you intend to do aloud, you're more likely to do it.

Atlanta-based brand development agency [Matchstic](http://Matchstic) uses this second tactic to improve how its teams and project managers work together.

It wasn't always this way. In the past, project managers would take client requirements and pass them along to team participants and wait for results. When team members failed to get things done, the project manager would bear the consequences.

Recognizing this problem, Matchstic chief strategist and co-founder Craig Johnson says management bought Belsky's book for everyone on the team. They read it together in the spring, and as an agency, began to change their approach to getting things done. Now, no meeting ends without every participant reviewing his or her action steps. Revenue is up 30 percent since, Johnson says.

"Adopting action-oriented vocabulary in our office has made a huge difference in how things get done," Johnson says. "If something doesn't get done, it's clear who's dropped the ball, which means people drop the ball much less often."



Craig Johnson

## **Uniting Against Idea Overload**

Belsky isn't the only business thinker who sees having too many ideas as potentially toxic. In addition to Behance's networking group, the company also hosts a popular productivity think tank called [The 99 Percent](http://The 99 Percent), a tribute to legendary inventor and entrepreneur Thomas Edison, who famously quipped that genius is "one percent inspiration, 99 percent perspiration."

This same community also gathers annually at a conference attended by many of the business elite, including venture capitalist Fred Wilson, partner at Union Square Ventures and early investor in Twitter who spoke at last year's confab. The next conference is scheduled for May 5-6, 2011, at the Times Center in New York City. Idea generation will play no part in the agenda.

"Most entrepreneurs focus more on the ideas and less on how they organize themselves for action," Belsky says. To him, and his inspiration, Edison, making ideas happen is all about the other 99 percent.